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SUBJECT: IRAQ MEDIA SILENT ON AFGHAN CREMATIONS

REF: SECSTATE 193560

1. Iraqi media monitored by the coalition forces, FBIS, and U.S. Embassy offices in Iraq devoted practically zero coverage to the reported burning of two Taliban fighters' bodies by U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

2. Iraqi media, instead, are closely following expected results of the recent constitutional referendum, and the first "Saddam trial," including the assassination of the defense lawyer of one of Saddam's co-defendants. In the four days since the Taliban story broke in the Australian media, Iraqi media have also covered the UN report on Lebanese PM Hariri's assassination and the visit to Iraq of Arab League chairman Amre Mousa. No major Iraqi newspaper, however, had commented on the body burning incident as of October 23. UK consulate coverage of Kurdish media outlets noted similar disinterest. Political contacts have not raised the issue with the embassy either.

3. Comment: Iraqi media generally reflect the views of associated political parties, and their reporting is generally a good barometer of their current relations with coalition forces. Stories critical of the U.S. or highlighting the presence of U.S. forces outside Iraq are rare in media outlets of the major Shia and Kurdish parties. News seekers in predominantly Sunni areas are believed to be more likely to turn to pan-Arab satellite TV for international and political news. Pan-Arab Al-Jazeera, and Al-Arabiya, according to FBIS, did cover the Afghan story on their respective websites. According to U.S. military monitors, Al Jazeera carried balanced factual reporting, including U.S. military comments that such actions were repugnant and that they would be investigated. Based the low visibility of this issue in Iraq so far, post does not plan to divert PD resources from its ongoing engagement on Iraqi issues.

SATTERFIELD